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ABSTRACT

Ellis' rational emotive theory is based on the assumption that people are born with a potential for both rational and irrational thinking. To analyze the relationship of irrational beliefs to sensitivity, depression, submission, anxiety, and neuroticism, an Irrationality Scale, containing eight irrational beliefs, was constructed from a review of Ellis' writings. This scale along with the Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire (NSQ) was given to 600 college students. An analysis of the results showed no significant relationship between argeement with any of the irrational beliefs and the sensitivity, depression, and submission scores on the NSQ. However, significant relationships were found between six of the eight irrational beliefs and anxiety, and between irrational belief number eight ("I should be treated fairly. When I am not, I cannot bear it") and neuroticism. Overall, irrationality was significantly related to anxiety, depression, and neuroticism as measured by the NSQ. These findings support Ellis' theory. As an extension of these findings future research should focus on beliefs which are linked to emotional health and growth. (BL)

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AN EMPIRICAL EVALUATION OF ELLIS' RATIONAL EMOTIVE THEORY

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Abstract

An Irrationality Scale which contained eight "irrational beliefs," was constructed from a review of Ellis' writings. This scale along with the Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire (NSQ) was given to 600 undergraduate college students. Agreement with six of the eight "irrational beliefs" and the overall irrationality scores were all found to be significantly related to anxiety as measured by the NSQ at the .01 level. Ellis' theory received further support by the fact that overall irrationality scores were also significantly related to our measures of depression and neuroticism.

Ellis' rational emotive theory is based on the assumption that people are born with a potential for both rational, straight thinking and irrational, unclear thinking. The former is said to result in happiness, growth and self actualization while the latter is linked to self-destruction, emotional problems and atrophy (Ellis, 1962,1967). While Elis argues convincingly for his position and presents much clinical evidence, there is actually very little empirical evidence that his "irrational beliefs" are indeed linked to specific, identifiable emotional problems such as neuroticism (Meichenbaum, 1979).

The purpose of this study was to analyze eight "irrational beliefs" in terms of their relationdhip to sensitivity, depression, submission, anxiety and neuroticism as measured by the Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire (Scheier and Cattell, 1961).

Method

From a review of Ellis' writings eight statements were constructed which we thought were representative of his "irrational beliefs." These irrational beliefs, which will be referred to later in the paper by numbers, are as follows:

1: It is an absolute necessity that you be loved or approved by virtually every significant other person in your community.

2: You should be thoroughly competent, adequate, and achieving in all possible respects if you are to consider yourself worthwhile.

3: People who are bad, wicked, or villanous should be severely punished.

4: It is easier to avoid certain life-difficulties and responsibilities than to face them.

5: It is awful and catastrophic when things are not the way you would very much like them to be.

6: Unhappiness is external and you have little or no ability to control your sorrow and disturbances.

7: Your past history is an all-important determinant of your present behavior and because something strongly effected your life at one time, it should always have a similar effect.

8: "I should be treated fairly. When I am not, it is horrible and I cannot bear it."

In combination these composed the "Irrationality Scale (IS)." Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each of the eight statements on a scale of from "1" (total disagreement) to "5" (total agreement). An overall irrationality score was computed for each participant by suming his or her coded responses to the eight statements. Since agreement with these statements would, according to Ellis, suggest irrationality, the higher the score, the higher the presumed irrationality.

Participants also completed the Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire (NSQ) which provides scores related to the following four dimensions: (1) sensitivity; (2) depression; (3) submission; and (4) anxiety. These four scores in combination yielded an overall neuroticism score.

The IS and the NSQ were given to 600 students enrolled in introductory psychology classes at Southwest Texas State University. The respondents were told not to put their names on the answer sheets provided and were assured their responses would remain

completely anonymous.

The relationship between the NSQ scores and agreement with each of the eight irrational beliefs, and between the NSQ scores and the overall irrationality scores, were determined by Pearson correlations. Because of the number of relationships investigated, the significance level was set at .01.

Results

An inspection of Table 1 reveals that no significant relationship existed between agreement with any of the irrational beliefs and the sensitivity, depression and submissive scores of the NSQ. However, significant relationships were found to exist

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Insert table 1 about here

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between the last six irrational beliefs and anxiety, and between irrational belief number 8 and neuroticism. Overall irrationality was significantly related to anxiety, depression and neuroticism as measured by the NSQ.

Conclusion

It is impossible to determine from this type of study if the irrational beliefs contributed to anxiety, or if other factors contributed to both. Nevertheless, the results are in agreement with what Ellis would have predicted. The relationships between anxiety and Ellis' irrational beliefs were all in the predicted direction. Approximately 10% of the variance in anxiety could be accounted for by variance in overall irrationality. Although this implies that many other factors influence anxiety, it does suggest

that Ellis' irrational beliefs are somehow linked to anxiety as measured by the NSQ. Ellis' theory was further supported by the fact that irrationality was not only significantly related to our measure of anxiety, but also to our measures of depression and neuroticism

While our primary purpose was to evaluate Ellis' theory, the implications for future research may be equally important. That is, since some beliefs appear to be linked to anxiety, there may be others which are linked to emotional health and growth. It may be possible to evaluate belief systems or philosophies in terms of their relationship to life satisfaction, productivity, contributions to society, and so forth. While we may never be able to say that one philosophy is better than another, we may be able to identify those aspects of a philosophy which are linked to growth and those which are not.

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TABLE 1

Pearson Correlation Coefficients Among

the NSQ Scores and Ellis' Irrational Beliefs

Irrational Beliefs	NEUROTICISM SCALE SCORES				
	Sensitivity	Depression	Submission	Anxiety	Neuroticism
#1	-.071	.074	.007	.077	.034
#2	-.056	.084	.030	.0805	.058
#3	-.085	.083	-.060	.102*	.019
#4	-.064	-.040	.022	.170**	.028
#5	-.043	.086	-.039	.232**	.087
#6	-.002	-.002	-.031	.126**	.031
#7	-.025	.047	-.086	.162**	.035
#8	.061	.059	-.056	.192**	.096*
Overall Irrationality	-.062	.114*	-.047	.306**	.118*

*$p < .01$; ** $p < .001$